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ABSTRACT

This study of the time-to-degree issue at institutions of higher education in Alabama reviewed existing reports on the problem, identified factors contributing to increases in time-to-degree, and surveyed baccalaureate programs in the state for the credit-hour degree requirements. Following an executive summary, Section 1 considers factors influencing extended time-to-degree, including student-controlled factors such as changing goals; institution-controlled factors, such as confusing curriculum requirements and policies on accepting transfer credits; and external factors, such as an increase in the number of required courses and rising tuition costs. Section 2 presents results of the credits-to-degree survey which found that Alabama institutions tend to require more credit hours than comparable national programs. Section 3 lists 17 recommendations which are organized under 3 categories: recommendations for the commission; recommendations for the institutions;, and recommendations for the legislature. The following are included in the recommendations: that the commission require new program proposals to compare required credit hours with similar programs in other states; that institutions consider guaranteeing time-to-degree by guaranteeing course availability for full-time students complying with program requirements; and that the legislature consider imposing a surcharge for excessive credits. Appended is the advisory board membership list. (Contains 26 references.) (DB)

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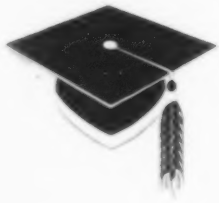
TO ENCOURAGE EFFICIENCY

A STUDY OF THE TIME–TO–DEGREE ISSUE FOR ALABAMA

Alabama Commission on Higher Education
August 8, 1997



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
To Encourage Efficiency:
A Study of the Time-to-Degree Issue for Alabama

In the last few years, there has been much public scrutiny of higher education, along with a demand for increased efficiency and effectiveness. Many factors have played a role in this climate: unpredictable federal and state support for higher education in many areas; the increasing competition for resources between institutions of higher education and between higher education and K-12 education; and the ongoing idea of doing more with less in business, government, and industry. In this environment, one of the recurrent topics studied in states across the nation has been the increase in time to degree. Time to degree is defined as the amount of time expended in completing a degree program from the point where a student first enrolls in a two-year or four-year college until he or she graduates. Recent research supports a wide-spread perception that there has been an increase in the time required for the completion of academic programs, particularly at the baccalaureate level. The increased time to complete these degrees results in lost time for students, as well as increased cost for students, parents, and other taxpayers.

Responding to national studies and concerns expressed by Alabama citizens regarding the issue, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education initiated a study of time to degree for the state. The purpose of the study was to determine what barriers exist, if any, that deter traditional students in Alabama from completion of baccalaureate degrees in four years. For the purpose of the study, a traditional student is defined as a student between the ages 16 and 24 who has degree completion as his or her primary pursuit. A second goal of the study was to recommend strategies or policies to encourage student success and timely completion of degrees.

As the first step in the study, the Commission staff reviewed reports from national education organizations and studies from other states. Second, an advisory group for the study, representing both two-year and four-year sectors of higher education, was appointed. The members of the advisory group helped to identify factors that could increase time to degree. The third step was to conduct a survey of credit hour degree requirements for baccalaureate programs in the state.

Section 1
Factors Influencing Extended Time to Degree

Many recent studies have given considerable attention to factors causing students to take longer than the traditional four academic years to complete baccalaureate degrees. Though there is some overlap, these factors can be divided among three categories: student-controlled factors, institution-controlled factors, and external factors.

Student-controlled factors have a significant effect on extended time to degree and vary greatly with the individual. Changing goals, taking on additional majors or changing majors, poor preparation for college, poor planning of the student's

curriculum, failure to register for needed courses, employment, and transfer from another institution are just a few of the factors controlled by students that add time to degree.

Institution-controlled factors have been identified in several studies done in other states. These may include confusing curriculum descriptions or requirements; scheduling conflicts and filled classes; inconsistent or confusing messages regarding the definition of full-time attendance; lenient institutional course withdrawal and forgiveness policies; and institutional policies on accepting transfer credits. Another factor, credit hours required for completion of academic programs, is the subject of Section 2.

External factors include burgeoning technological and information advances that have caused some professions and their accrediting agencies to promote or require additional courses in baccalaureate degree programs. Faculties may increase program requirements to insure that their students are made aware of the full range of the discipline. In addition, rising tuition costs have made higher education less affordable. In Alabama, the median undergraduate tuition has risen over 214 percent since 1980-81. These rising costs and the lack of availability of student aid have made it necessary for many students to work while pursuing their degrees.

Section 2
Results of the Alabama Credit-to-Degree Survey

Many studies have contended that credit hour inflation is a primary cause of increased time to degree for students. Though the total credit hours taken is often the consequence of student choice, such factors as the information explosion, requirements of state and national licensure, and increasing curriculum scope have caused an increase in basic requirements for many academic programs.

In August and September 1996, the Commission staff conducted a credit-hour-to-degree survey. All public four-year institutions in Alabama responded to the survey, which asked for credit hour requirements for each baccalaureate program at the respective institution. The responses were compiled and compared with national data collected by the Florida Board of Regents in a similar study, which listed programs according to their six digit citation found in the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP). The Florida study compiled data on degree requirements from more than ninety public institutions throughout the United States.

The Alabama data was compared to the national data in two ways. The first was a comparison of an Alabama mean and median in individual program areas listed at the six-digit CIP level with the corresponding national mean and median. A second comparison showed the relationship of the national and state data in broader discipline categories at the two-digit CIP level. In both comparisons, Alabama programs in general required more credit hours than other programs at the same CIP levels.

The comparison at the two-digit level reveals that in a majority of institutions on the semester calendar, Alabama is four to six percent above the national mean (18 program areas) and five to seven percent above the national median (16 program

areas). For the quarter calendar institutions, several program groups are three to four percent above the national data for both the mean (nine program groups) and the median (eight program groups).

For the quarter calendar institutions, seven program groups are virtually equal to the national mean, while eight groups are virtually equal to the national median. For the semester calendar institutions, only one program group is less than two percent over the national mean and median.

A final examination compared the mean and median for Alabama programs with 120 credit hours for the semester calendar institutions and 180 credit hours for the quarter calendar institutions. The figures of 120 semester hours and 180 quarter hours have represented historically the minimum number of credit hours required for baccalaureate programs. In this comparison, all Alabama programs at the two-digit CIP level exceed 120 semester hours or 180 quarter hours respectively. Percentages above the minimum standard range from a low of 2.6 percent to a high of 25.2 percent.

There are some limitations to this section that should be mentioned. The information collected in the Florida study is a good basis for comparison. However, though between 120 and 130 semester credit hours is generally recognized as an acceptable number for most bachelor's degree programs, there is no nationally recognized standard. Consequently, the national figures in the Florida study do not exhibit ideal numbers of credit hours for each program, but reflect more what is typical in such programs. Also, there may be significant variations in the objectives of different programs at the same six-digit level of the CIP taxonomy; this is even more apt to be true at the two-digit CIP level. Because of the difference in objectives of programs in the same field, there may be sound reasons why some programs require more hours. However, the comparison of the data does suggest that Alabama institutions should review baccalaureate program curricula with an intent of reducing credit hour requirements where possible.

Furthermore, the Florida study itself gives evidence that credit hour requirements have increased. In the past, 120 semester hours was considered a standard requirement for many bachelor's degree programs, particularly those in the liberal arts. In the Florida study, almost sixty percent of liberal arts programs in the survey required more than 120 semester hours, including such disciplines as foreign languages, social sciences, philosophy, and psychology. Sixty to 75 percent of the programs in the sciences, business, communications, and the visual and performing arts required more than 120 hours. More than 75 percent of programs in agriculture, architecture, education, natural resources, health professions, engineering, and transportation exceeded 120 semester hours.

Section 3
Recommendations

Following are recommendations to reduce time to degree, organized under three categories: Recommendations for the Commission; Recommendations for the Institutions; and Recommendations for the Legislature. Some of the recommendations are the suggestion of the Commission staff, while others are taken

from reports of other states. Several of the recommendations might lend themselves well to performance-based budgeting.

With the acceptance of these recommendations on August 8, 1997, the Commission on Higher Education directed the staff to work with the appropriate advisory groups to explore the strategies recommended. Before implementa-tion or endorsement of a strategy, the staff will provide a report to the Commission regarding the feasibility of the recommendation and any objections raised.

Recommendations for the Commission

1. The Commission should consider requiring that new program proposals submitted by all public institutions, both two-year and four-year, show a comparison of credit hours to be required in the proposed program with similar programs in other states. This same requirement should be extended to proposals for extensions and alterations of existing programs.

2. The Commission should consider requiring that the institutions submit a written justification and a description of the entire curriculum for new program proposals exceeding 128 semester hours or 192 quarter hours. The same credit-hour limitation should hold true for existing programs undergoing extensions and alterations.

3. The Commission should consider adopting a policy that a program exceeding 128 semester hours or 192 quarter hours would not be eligible for a nonviability waiver in the implementation of Act 96-557.

4. The Commission should consider asking the institutions to devise an annual report detailing the review of credit hour requirements of existing academic programs and the reduction of requirements where advisable.

5. The Commission should consider eliminating formula funding for all undergraduate students who have attempted 150 or more semester hours (or the equivalent quarter hours) towards a degree without graduating. (Adapted from a recommendation by the Texas Comptroller.)

6. The Commission should consider developing strategies to increase the amount of financial aid available to traditional full-time students (that is, those students between the ages of 16 and 24 who have degree completion as their primary pursuit).

7. Using performance-based budgeting, the Commission should consider rewarding departments at public institutions for timely completions in academic programs.

8. The Commission should consider sponsoring a conference or other activity for Alabama institutions to explore strategies for reducing time to degree for working adults who are pursuing a degree on a part-time basis.

Recommendations for the Institutions

9. The institutions should consider guaranteeing time to degree. This guarantee would provide that a student who satisfied admission requirements, attended college full-time, followed the requirements for the program of study, and passed every course would be able to register for the courses needed to graduate in the period of time stated for that program. (Texas)

10. The institutions should consider basing the definition of "full time" on the number of credit hours needed each semester or quarter to graduate in four years, without attendance at summer sessions, and offer block tuition to meet those needs. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation.)

11. The institutions should consider reviewing and revising "drop" and "forgiveness" policies so that such policies encourage timely completion. Exceptions could be made for situations involving extreme emergencies or conditions. (Florida)

12. The institutions should consider limiting enrollment in courses outside degree program requirements, allowing students to enroll in no more than three courses beyond 128 semester hours or 192 quarter hours. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation)

13. The institutions should consider encouraging high school students to earn college-level credit by counseling potential students to participate in the College Board Advanced Placement (AP) Program, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, or the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). The institutions could grant appropriate academic credit to students who demonstrate competency by these means. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation).

14. The institutions should consider providing financial rewards to students who complete degrees in three academic years. For example, the institutions could provide tuition rebates in the amount of $1000 to students who complete requirements for baccalaureate degrees within three academic years from their initial registration in a higher education institution. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation.)

15. The institutions should consider using or enhancing the use of technology to increase information to and about students. Three possible initiatives for the use of technology are automated degree audit systems; on-line access to information on degree programs and requirements, course schedules, and catalogs; and electronic transmission of student data such as transcripts and portfolios. (Washington)

Recommendations for the Legislature

16. The Legislature should consider legislation imposing a surcharge for excessive credits. This tuition surcharge to undergraduate students would equal the full cost of education for more than 150 semester credit hours (or the equivalent in quarter credit hours) attempted in public institutions of higher education. (Texas)

17. The Legislature should consider legislation to encourage the use of distance education in providing heavily subscribed, lower and upper division core courses. This legislation would authorize the Commission on Higher Education to approve the offering of undergraduate core courses statewide via distance education by designated institutions. The legislation also would provide that all public institutions must accept transfer of these courses for full credit. The purpose of these courses primarily would be to meet the needs of working adults who are part-time students. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation.)

Key to Sources of Recommendations:

(Florida)—Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission (PEPC). Course Withdrawal and Forgiveness Policies. Tallahassee, FL: PEPC, 1996.

(Texas)—Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Division of Research, Planning and Finance. Ten Strategies and Their Financial Implications for Reducing Time-to-Degree in Texas Universities. Austin, TX: October, 1996.

(Texas Comptroller)—Sharp, John [Comptroller]. Disturbing the Peace: The Challenge of Change in Texas Government, Vol. 2. Austin, TX: Comptroller of Public Accounts, 1996.

(Washington)—Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB). Institutional Productivity Initiatives: Time-to-Degree Study. Olympia, WA: HECB, 1994. Washington.

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With the acceptance of this report and the recommendations within it on August 8, 1997, the Commission on Higher Education directed the staff to work with the appropriate advisory groups to explore the strategies recommended. Before implementation or endorsement of a strategy, the staff will provide a report to the Commission regarding the feasibility of the recommendation and any objections raised.

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Introduction

In the last few years, there has been much public scrutiny of higher education, along with a demand for increased efficiency and effectiveness. Many factors have played a role in this climate: unpredictable federal and state support for higher education in many areas; the increasing competition for resources between institutions of higher education and between higher education and K-12 education; and the ongoing idea of doing more with less in business, government, and industry.

In this environment, one of the recurrent topics studied in states across the nation has been the increase in time to degree. Time to degree is defined as the amount of time expended in completing a degree program from the point where a student first enrolls in a two-year or four-year college until he or she graduates. With a widespread perception that there has been an increase in the time required for the completion of academic programs, many states have undertaken studies of the issue. In September 1996 the office of the State Higher Education Executive Organization (SHEEO) reported the responses to a survey of states' efforts to decrease time to degree. Twenty-seven states reported the initiation of studies or the implementation of specific strategies related to the topic. During this same period, the Southern Regional Education Board reported that more than half of its member states had examined policies related to time to degree and that several states were implementing changes in practices and policies. Some states in fact have adopted legislation that has imposed limits on the number of credit hours that may be required for academic programs or surcharges on students who exceed a certain number of credit hours.[1]

Research has shown that one development affecting the extension of time to degree is the influx of older employed students, often with family responsibilities, into college classrooms. Understandably, these students take only as many hours as they can manage with their other commitments and show little interest in adhering to a time line in completing a degree.[2] These students are not the focus of this study. Rather, the group that is the object of this study are those students who are referred to as traditional students, those who are between 16 and 24 years of age and have degree completion as their primary pursuit.

Though degree completion at all levels is a concern, the degree level sparking the most interest and the most serious debate has been the baccalaureate level. Analytical studies, as well as much anecdotal evidence,

have demonstrated that fewer traditional students are finishing four-year baccalaureate programs in four academic years. For example, one recent study reported the results of a nation-wide sample of 365 baccalaureate-granting institutions studied over a twenty-year period. The study revealed that 39.9 percent of first-time freshmen entering college in the fall of 1985 had completed a degree within four years, compared to 46.7 percent of first-time freshmen who had entered college nineteen years earlier who completed their degrees in four years. The increased time to complete these degrees results in lost time for students, as well as increased cost for students, parents, and other taxpayers.[3]

Responding to national studies and concerns expressed by Alabama citizens regarding the issue, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education initiated a study of time to degree for the state. The purpose of the study was to determine what barriers exist, if any, that deter traditional students in Alabama from completion of baccalaureate degrees in four years. A second goal of the study was to recommend strategies or policies to encourage student success and timely completion of degrees. As the first step in the study, the Commission staff reviewed reports from national education organizations and studies from other states. Second, an advisory group for the study, representing both two-year and four-year sectors of higher education, was appointed. The chancellor of the Department of Postsecondary Education appointed representatives from the two year colleges, while the Council of Chief Academic Officers selected representatives from the senior institutions. Members of the advisory group are listed in the appendix. The advisory group met with the Commission staff in April and May 1996 and helped to identify factors that could increase time to degree. The third step was to conduct a survey of credit hour degree requirements for baccalaureate programs in the state.

This report is the result of the three phases of the study. The first section will discuss the reasons for increased time to degree, based on national and other states' reports. The second section will summarize the findings of the credit-to-degree survey sent to all public senior institutions in Alabama. Again based primarily on studies from other states, the third chapter will set forth recommendations to increase timely completion of baccalaureate degrees. These recommendations are offered for consideration and discussion to the Commission and to the institutions.

Time-to-degree studies recently completed by several states have included longitudinal analysis of how long students are taking to complete baccalaureate degrees. Because the statewide student unit data system for Alabama is still to be implemented, there is no longitudinal data for Alabama to compare current completion rates with those of the past. However, given the consistency of findings from other states and the anecdotal evidence in Alabama from parents and students, there is little to suggest that such analysis in Alabama would yield different conclusions.

Section 1

Factors Influencing Extended Time to Degree

Many recent studies have given considerable attention to factors causing students to take longer than the traditional four academic years to complete baccalaureate degrees. Though there is some overlap, these factors can be divided among three categories: student-controlled factors, institution-controlled factors, and external factors.

Student Factors

Interviews of students summarized in reports from other states reveal that students often realize their own roles in the extended stay in higher education. However, student-controlled factors vary greatly in substance and from individual to individual. One scholar has noted that degree attainment is not only predicted by grades and SAT scores, but also by such contrasting variables as "socio-economic status, religion, hedonism, and political orientation."[4] Other studies have cited national data that suggest that students no longer feel pressured to complete degrees in the traditional four years.[5] Some students take time off from their studies to pursue various objectives or to meet family commitments. Changing majors or transferring from one institution to another often results in a loss of credits. Students sometimes fail to plan their curriculum so that they get needed courses at the appropriate time, or they fail to register in time to get needed classes.

Students' changing goals often play a part in extending time to degree. Many begin college with unclear goals and consequently delay selecting a major. Some students decide after they enter college to pursue a double major to make themselves more marketable, while others take additional courses not within their majors for personal interest. Still others arrive at college poorly prepared and find that they must complete remedial courses before taking course work in their major.

Some students prolong their academic careers in an attempt to keep their grade point average at a certain level. They take fewer credits per term or they drop courses in which they are doing poorly late in the term. This late dropping of courses, sometimes allowed by liberal drop and add policies at an institution, has two results related to extended time to degree. First, the student who drops the course may have less than a full academic load that term. Second, if the

course is heavily subscribed, the enrollment of the student who dropped the course has filled a space that can not be used by another student.[6]

Employment is a factor often mentioned as slowing progress toward degree attainment. Recent reports show that the number of traditional college students working has reached a new high in recent years. In 1996, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that almost half of full-time college students were employed in October 1993 and one quarter of them were working at least twenty hours per week. The report stated also that the percentage of full-time college students, age 16 to 24, who were employed had increased from 34 percent in 1970 to 47 percent in 1988, and has remained around that level.[7] Work responsibilities often cause students to take time off from college or to take only light credit loads to make time for jobs. While some students choose to work for personal rather than financial reasons, rising tuition costs and decreased student aid have contributed to the need for many students to work.

Institutional Factors

While students' decisions and actions have much to do with extended time to degree, institution-controlled factors also may play a role, as demonstrated in a study done by the Washington State Higher Education Board. The 1994 study reported a number of barriers to timely degree completion identified by institutions within the state resulting from institutional policies, procedures, or rules.[8]

Institutions' curriculum descriptions or requirements often contribute to inefficiency. General education requirements are sometimes confusing or complicated and result in the student making poor choices regarding course work. Requirements for certain majors add both credits and specific prerequisites. For example, calculus is typically the lowest-level math course that will count toward an engineering degree, but not all institutions require that students be ready for calculus at matriculation. Consequently, many students must complete math prerequisites before taking calculus, thus taking additional credits in a program already recognized as a five-year baccalaureate.

Other factors identified in the Washington study relate to institutional planning, scheduling, and advisement. Students sometimes find that needed courses are unavailable because of scheduling conflicts or filled classes. Though adding additional sections of courses would alleviate this problem to an extent, this remedy is often difficult for institutions in a time of budgetary constraints. Institutions in Washington state found that students may also be delayed while waiting for admission into popular majors. This delay may effect both native and transfer students and may cause students to take additional courses while biding their time. Inadequate advisement to help students make informed decisions may play a major role in adding time to degree. Finally, the

Washington study stated that inconsistent or confused messages to students about full-time attendance and its relationship to graduating in four years also play a role. Fifteen credits per term is the minimum credit load needed to graduate in four years for either a 120 semester hour program or a 180 quarter hour program. However, for tuition or financial aid or other specific purposes, an institution may consider ten or twelve credits as full time. That such lighter loads are defined as full time may confuse students regarding the course load needed for timely degree completion.

Although discussed as a student-related cause of delayed degree attainment, course withdrawal and forgiveness practices also are institutional factors. A recent Florida study highlighted the role of institutional course withdrawal and forgiveness policies in establishing an environment that encourages delay in completion.[9] These policies may allow students to have low grades forgiven by substituting the grade on the course when the course is repeated or to withdraw without penalty at any time during the term. These policies have been considered to be beneficial for students, but the Florida study reports questions that have arisen regarding the costs of such practices. For the student, these costs manifest themselves in lost time and difficulties in articulation brought on by variations in these policies. Conversations within the Alabama time-to-degree advisory group reveal that withdrawal and forgiveness policies vary among Alabama institutions. Though not considered to be a primary cause of extended time to degree in Alabama, institutions might consider a review of such policies to insure that they do not contribute to delayed completion.

Finally, institutional policy on accepting transfer credits may also add time and credits to students' academic careers. In some cases, students must retake courses in order to satisfy the transfer institution's requirements. The Southern Regional Education Board has reported that more than half of the SREB states have examined policies on student transfer in the last three years, and several have implemented changes in policies and practices. In Alabama, the Articulation and General Studies Committee, established by the Legislature in 1994, is working to resolve problems in transferring credit from one Alabama public institution to another. [10]

External Factors

There are also external factors which have contributed to the problem of extended time to degree. Burgeoning technological and information advances have caused some professions and their accrediting agencies to promote or require additional courses in baccalaureate degree programs. On college campuses, faculties increase program requirements to insure that their students are made aware of the full range of the discipline, which often is increasingly

complex. The result of these efforts to enhance academic programs is often extended time to degree.[11]

As noted previously, student employment sometimes impedes timely degree completion, particularly when the work requires twenty or more hours per week. Certainly, students sometimes choose to work for reasons other than financing their college educations. However, external factors contribute to the need for employment for many students. Changes in the costs and funding of public higher education have resulted in rising tuition, making college less affordable. Since 1980, tuition has more than doubled at public four-year colleges and universities in the United States. For Alabama undergraduate students at public institutions, the median tuition has risen from $687 in 1980-81 to $2,160 in 1996-97, a change of over 214 percent. Some students may work because parents are unable or unwilling to pay the cost of higher education. The lack of availability of student aid may also play a role.[12]

Summary

A survey of recent studies concerning the problem of extended time needed for degree completion reveals that factors increasing time to degree fall in three categories: those controlled by the student; those in which institutional practices and policies play a part; and those related to external factors. Though these causes are interrelated to some extent, attention to specific factors in each of these categories may provide strategies for increasing timely degree completion.

Section 2

Results of the Alabama Credit-to-Degree Survey

Many studies have contended that credit hour inflation is a primary cause of increased time to degree for students. In 1995 a publication of the United States Department of Education highlighted an increase in average credit hours taken by graduates during the period 1972 to 1993. The report stated that the average number of credits earned by students receiving bachelor's degrees rose 10.5 percent, from 126 semester hours to 139, during this period. Though the total credit hours taken is often the consequence of student choice, such factors as the information explosion, requirements of state and national licensure, and increasing curriculum scope have caused an increase in basic requirements for many academic programs.[13]

The second section of this report shows the results of a credit-hour-to-degree survey conducted by the Commission staff in the late summer and early fall of 1996. All public four-year institutions in Alabama responded to the survey, which asked for credit hour requirements for each baccalaureate program at the respective institution. The responses were compiled and compared with national data collected by the Florida Board of Regents in a similar study, which listed programs according to their six digit citation found in the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), published by the National Center for Education Statistics. The Florida study compiled data on degree requirements from more than ninety public institutions throughout the United States.[14]

The staff prepared three tables illustrating the comparison of the state and national data in two areas. The data were first compared by individual program area, listed at the six-digit CIP level in tables for semester-calendar and quarter-calendar institutions. A second comparison showed the relationship of the national and state data in broader discipline categories at the two-digit CIP level. A fourth table contrasted the state data with 120 semester hours and 180 quarter hours, figures that generally are recognized as a minimum for baccalaureate programs.

There are some limitations to this section that should be mentioned. The information collected in the Florida study is a good basis for comparison. However, though between 120 and 130 semester credit hours is generally recognized as an acceptable number for most bachelor's degree programs, there is no nationally recognized standard.[15] Consequently, the national figures in the Florida study do not exhibit ideal numbers of credit hours for each program, but

reflect more what is typical in such programs. Also, there may be significant variations in the objectives of different programs at the same six-digit level of the CIP taxonomy; this is even more apt to be true at the two-digit CIP level. Because of the difference in objectives of programs in the same field, there may be sound reasons why some programs require more hours.

Furthermore, the Florida study itself gives evidence that credit hour requirements have increased. In the past, 120 semester hours was considered a standard requirement for many bachelor's degree programs, particularly those in the liberal arts. In the Florida study, almost sixty percent of liberal arts programs in the survey required more than 120 semester hours, including such disciplines as foreign languages, social sciences, philosophy, and psychology. Sixty to 75 percent of the programs in the sciences, business, communications, and the visual and performing arts required more than 120 hours. More than 75 percent of programs in agriculture, architecture, education, natural resources, health professions, engineering, and transportation exceeded 120 semester hours.[16]

Tables 1 and 2 (pages 10 and 16) show a comparison of state and national data by specific program area. In preparing the tables, the staff compiled the survey responses from the institutions and calculated an Alabama mean and median for programs found in the Florida study. The information is organized in two tables, by semester calendar and by quarter calendar.

Table 3 (page 22) illustrates a comparison of the Alabama programs with the national data by two-digit CIP category. The two-digit CIP category provides a broader look at the data by groups of related instructional programs rather than the specific program areas.

A comparison at the two-digit level reveals that in a majority of areas at institutions on the semester calendar, Alabama is four to six percent above the national mean (18 program areas) and five to seven percent above the national median (16 program areas). For the quarter calendar institutions, several program groups are three to four percent above the national data for both the mean (nine program groups) and the median (eight program groups).

For the quarter calendar institutions, seven program groups are virtually equal to the national mean, while eight groups are virtually equal to the national median. For the semester calendar institutions, only one program group is less than two percent over the national mean and median.

Table 4 (page 24) shows a comparison of the mean and median for Alabama programs with 120 credit hours for the semester calendar institutions and 180 credit hours for the quarter calendar institutions. The figures of 120 semester hours and 180 quarter hours have represented historically the minimum number of credit hours required for baccalaureate programs. In this

comparison, all Alabama program groups at the two-digit CIP level exceed 120 semester hours or 180 quarter hours respectively. Percentages above the minimum standard range from a low of 2.6 percent to a high of 25.2 percent.

Summary

In summary, the comparison of requirements for baccalaureate programs at Alabama public institutions with requirements for similar programs in other states shows that Alabama programs typically require a greater number of credit hours. In some cases, the difference is small, while in others, it may exceed twenty percent.

Though the national figures taken from the Florida study probably show what is the typical credit hour requirements for many programs, there may be differences in the Alabama programs that justify the requirement for more credit hours. However, the comparison of the data does suggest that Alabama institutions should review baccalaureate program curricula with an intent of reducing credit hour requirements where possible.

Table 1

COMPARISON OF CREDIT TO DEGREE REQUIREMENTS FOR ALABAMA BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS WITH NATIONAL DATA—SEMESTER CALENDAR

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-SEM. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Sem. Hrs.
01.0102	1	Agric. Business	132	132	126.7	128
01.0103	1	Agric. Bus. & Econ.	133	133	126.7	128
02.0201	1	Animal Sci.	137	137	126.8	128
02.0301	1	Food Science & Tech.	135.5	135.5	126.8	128
02.9999	1	Agriculture, Other	132	132	127	128
04.0301	2	Regional & Urban Planning	130	130	125.7	122
05.0102	1	Amer. Studies	128	128	122.1	120
05.0103	1	Asian Studies	128	128	122.4	120
05.0107	1	Lat. Am. Studies	128	128	122.7	121
09.0101	1	Communications	128	128	124.1	124
09/0201	1	Advertising	136.5	136.5	124.1	124
09.0401	2	Journalism	136	136	124.6	124
09.0501	2	Public Relations	134.3	134.8	125	125
09.0701	4	Radio & TV Broadcasting	133	133.5	124.5	125
11.0101	8	Computer & Info. Sciences	131	133.3	125.2	124
11.0401	1	Information Sciences & Syst.	132	132	123	120
13.1001	6	Special Ed.	135.2	135	126.9	125
13.1012	1	Educ. of Speech Impaired	138	138	129.1	126

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-SEM. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Sem. Hrs.
13.1202	9	Elementary Ed.	137.9	132.8	129.2	128
13.1203	1	Jr. High/Middle Sch. Ed.	129	129	124.9	125
13.1204	8	Early Childhood Ed.	133.4	132.3	129.6	128
13.1205	6	Secondary Ed.	144.7	145.3	127.8	126
13.1302	5	Art Education	141.4	139.5	128.4	126
13.1307	4	Health Teacher Ed.	133.6	132.8	127.8	128
13.1311	2	Math Teacher Ed.	139.5	139.5	126.6	126
13.1312	8	Music Teacher Ed.	147.9	148.5	131.5	130
13.1314	7	Physical Ed. Teaching	135.1	134.5	128.2	128
14.0201	1	Aerospace Engineering	136	136	133.4	133.4
14.0701	2	Chemical Engineering	140	140	132.2	132
14.0801	4	Civil Engineering	137.8	137	132.9	134
14.0901	1	Computer Engineering	140	140	131.3	132
14.1001	3	Electrical Engineering	135.3	134	131.8	131
14.1801	1	Materials Engineering	143.5	143.5	131.5	130.5
14.1901	3	Mechanical Engineering	139.6	141	131.5	131
14.2001	1	Metallurgical Engineering	144	144	131.8	131
14.2101	1	Mining Engineering	141	141	134.2	135.5

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-SEM. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Sem. Hrs.
14.2501	1	Petroleum Engineering	141	141	134.3	132
15.0201	1	Civil Eng. Tech.	136	136	131.8	131.5
15.0303	1	Electronics Eng. Tech.	128	128	131.4	131.5
15.0603	2	Ind. Maintenance Tech.	130.5	130.5	128	128
15.0805	1	Mech. Eng. Tech.	133	133	129.5	128.5
16.0102	1	Linguistics	128	128	122.4	120
16.0402	1	Russian	128	128	122.7	120
16.0501	5	German	128	128	123.1	122
16.0901	8	French	128.8	129.5	123.3	122.5
16.0905	7	Spanish	128.4	129	123.4	124
16.1201	1	Classics	128	128	122.3	120
19.0101	6	Home Ec., Gen.	135.4	135.5	125.7	126
19.0402	1	Consumer Econ. & Sciences	128	128	124.3	124.5
19.0503	1	Dietetics/Human Nutrition Studies	129	129	126.6	128
19.0701	1	Indiv.& Family Dev. Studies	128	128	125.3	124
19.0901	3	Clothing/Apparel & Textile Studies	130	131	125.5	125
23.0101	8	English	129.9	128.8	123.3	122
23.1001	5	Speech & Rhet. Studies	130.3	129.5	123.8	124
24.0101	1	Liberal Arts & Sciences	128	128	123.3	120
26.0101	9	Biology	132.3	132.8	124.3	124
26.0501	1	Microbiology	138	138	125.4	125

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-SEM. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Sem. Hrs.
26.0607	3	Marine Biology	133	131	134.3	128
27.0101	8	Mathematics	129.1	130	123.7	122
31.0503	1	Athletic Training	133.5	133.5	126.3	126.5
38.0101	3	Philosophy	128	128	123.4	123
38.0201	1	Religion/ Religious Studies	128	128	123.3	123
40.0501	8	Chemistry	130	132.8	124.4	124
40.0601	3	Geology	128	128	124.8	124
40.0801	7	Physics	129.7	133.8	124.8	124
42.0101	8	Psychology	127.9	128.5	123.6	122
43.0104	4	Criminal Justice Studies	128.5	129	123.5	122.5
44.0701	7	Social Work	128.9	129.5	124.3	124
45.0101	1	Social Sciences	130	130	122.7	121
45.0201	2	Anthropology	128	128	123.4	122
45.0601	2	Economics	128	128	123.1	121.5
45.0701	3	Geography	128	128	123.3	121
45.0801	8	History	128.8	129.5	123.2	122
45.0901	1	International Relations	128	128	123.3	122.5
45.1001	8	Political Science	128.5	129	123.4	123
45.1101	9	Sociology	129.3	130	123.2	122
50.0301	1	Dance	128	128	125.7	125
50.0402	2	Graphic Design	140	140	125.9	124
50.0408	2	Interior Design	128	128	127.6	126
50.0501	5	Dramatic/ Theatre Arts	130	130	124.9	124

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-SEM. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Sem. Hrs.
50.0703	2	Art History	128	128	122.9	121
50.0901	6	Music, General	132.5	132	125.2	124
50.0903	5	Music, Gen. Performance	137.1	137.5	128.1	126
50.0904	2	Music Theory & Composition	138.5	138.5	128.1	126
51.0204	1	Speech Lang. Path. & Aud.	128	128	123.9	124
51.0706	2	Medical Records Administration	131.8	131.8	127.3	129
51.0807	1	Physician's Asst.	165	165	137.1	130
51.0905	1	Nuclear Medicine Tech.	131	131	132	132.5
51.0907	1	Radiologic Sciences	137	137	128.5	128
51.0908	1	Respiratory Ther.	147	147	135.5	135.5
51.1002	1	Cytotechnology	133.5	133.5	136.3	137.5
51.1005	4	Medical Tech.	154.6	148.5	129.4	128
51.1601	5	Nursing	129.5	129	127.3	128
51.2305	1	Music Therapy	147	147	134.1	132
51.2306	1	Occup. Therapy	148	148	130.4	130.5
52.0101	2	Business, Gen.	128.5	128.5	124.4	124.4
52.0201	7	Business Adm. & Mgt., Gen.	129.1	130	124.3	124.5
52.0202	1	Contract Mgt. & Procurement	128	128	124.7	126
52.0301	8	Accounting	129.4	131	125.4	126
52.0601	6	Business Economics	129.5	132	125.7	126

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-SEM. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Sem. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Sem. Hrs.
52.0801	8	Finance, Gen.	129.4	131	125.6	126
52.1001	1	Human Resources Mgt.	128	128	126.6	128
52.1201	3	Mgt. Info. Systems	128	128	127.4	128
52.1301	1	Mgt. Science	128	128	125.8	126
52.1401	8	Business Marketing	129.4	131	125.1	125

Table 2

COMPARISON OF CREDIT TO DEGREE REQUIREMENTS FOR ALABAMA BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS WITH NATIONAL DATA—QUARTER CALENDAR

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-QTR. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Qtr. Hrs.
01.0103	1	Agric. Business	192	192	190	192
02.0101	1	Agric., Gen.	192	192	190	192
02.0201	1	Animal Sciences	192	192	193	192
02.0209	1	Poultry Science	192	192	190	192
02.0403	1	Horticulture	192	192	190	192
03.0102	1	Environ. Studies	208	208	190	189
03.0501	1	Wildlife Science	205	205	193	195
04.0201	1	Architecture	251	251	246	245
04.0401	1	Environ. Design	203	203	186	186
04.0501	1	Interior Arch.	197	197	241-242	241-242
04.0601	1	Landscape Arch.	251	251	237	235-236
09.0101	2	Communications	196	196	186	186
09.0401	2	Journalism	191	191	187	186
09.0501	2	Public Relations	192	192	188	188
09.0701	2	Radio & Broadcasting	191	191	187	188
11.0101	7	Computer & Info Sciences	194.1	193.5	187	186
13.1001	4	Special Ed.	202	204	191	188
13.1201	1	Adult & Cont. Ed.	204	204	198	198
13.1202	8	Elementary Ed.	203.1	201.5	193	192
13.1204	6	Early Childhood Ed.	204.5	204.5	193-194	192
13.1205	7	Secondary Ed.	216.9	222	192	189

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-QTR. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Qtr. Hrs.
13.1305	1	English Teacher Ed.	213.5	213.5	190-191	189
13.1306	1	Foreign Language Ed.	235.5	235.5	192	189
13.1307	1	Health Teacher Ed.	204	204	192	192
13.1311	1	Math Teacher Ed.	219	219	192	196
13.1312	1	Music Teacher Ed.	218	218	196	195
13.1314	4	Physical Ed. Teaching	207.8	210	192	192
13.1316	1	Science Ed.	220.5	220.5	193-194	192
13.1320	1	Trade & Ind. Teacher Ed.	192	192	189	188
14.0201	1	Aerospace Engineering	210	210	200	201
14.0301	1	Agric. Engineering	207	207	199-200	201
14.0401	1	Architectural Engineering	205	205	247	246
14.0701	2	Chemical Engineering	206.5	206.5	198	195
14.0801	2	Civil Engineering	205.5	205.5	199	201
14.0901	2	Computer Engineering	209.5	209.5	196-197	198
14.1001	2	Electrical Engineering	207	207	198	196-197
14.1501	1	Geological Engineering	203	203	201	201
14.1701	1	Materials Engineering	196	196	198	197

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-QTR. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Qtr. Hrs.
14.1801	2	Mechanical Engineering	197.5	197.5	198	196-197
14.2801	1	Textile Engineering	205	205	199	202
16.0101	1	Foreign Lang. & Lit.	200	200	186	186
16.0402	1	Russian	192	192	184	180
16.0501	2	French	186	186	184-185	184-185
16.0905	2	Spanish	186	186	184-185	184-185
19.0503	1	Dietetics	196	196	189	192
19.0701	1	Individual & Family Dev. Studies	185	185	187-188	186
19.0901	1	Apparel & Textiles	199	199	189	187-188
23.0101	8	English	187.6	188.5	185	183
23.1001	2	Speech & Rhet. Studies	186	186	186	186
24.0101	2	Liberal Arts & Sciences	196	196	184-185	180
26.0101	6	Biology	191	196	186	186
26.0202	1	Biochemistry	200	200	187	186
26.0501	1	Microbiology	207	207	187-188	187-188
26.0607	3	Marine Biology	193	192	201	192
26.0701	1	Zoology	205	205	187-188	186
26.0702	1	Entomology	192	192	187-188	187-188
27.0101	8	Mathematics	190.9	192	186	183
27.0301	2	Applied Math, Gen.	198	198	187-188	183

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-QTR. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Qtr. Hrs.
27.0501	1	Mathematical Statistics	192	192	185	181-182
30.0101	1	Biol. & Phys. Sciences	192	192	187-188	186
31.0503	2	Athletic Training	186	186	189	190
31.0504	1	Sport & Fitness Administration	183.5	183.5	183	183
38.0101	2	Philosophy	192	192	184-185	184-185
38.0201	2	Religion/ Religious Studies	192	192	184-185	184-185
40.0101	3	Physical Sciences	186.6	190	190-191	183
40.0501	5	Chemistry	190.8	192	186	186
40.0601	2	Geology	197.5	197.5	187-188	186
40.0801	3	Physics	195.3	197	187-188	186
42.0101	8	Psychology	188	185	186	183
43.0104	6	Criminal Justice Studies	185.8	187.5	186	186
44.0401	1	Public Admin.	180	180	186	186
44.0701	2	Social Work	192	195.5	186	186
45.0101	4	Social Sciences, General	182	183	184	181-182
45.0201	2	Anthropology	186	186	184-185	183
45.0601	2	Economics	192	192	184-185	183
45.0701	2	Geography	186	186	184-185	181-182
45.0801	9	History	188.4	185	184-185	183
45.1001	6	Political Science	188.2	188.5	184-185	183
45.1101	8	Sociology	187.4	187.5	184-185	183

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-QTR. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Qtr. Hrs.
50.0402	1	Graphic Design, Comm. Art & Illustration	195	195	189	186
50.0404	1	Industrial Design	195	195	202	193-194
50.0501	2	Drama/Theatre	192	192	187-188	186
50.0701	4	Art, General	191	192	186	183
50.0702	2	Fine Arts	193.5	193.5	189	189
50.0703	1	Art History	192	192	184-185	182
50.0901	3	Music, Gen.	193.6	192	187-188	186
50.0903	1	Music Performance	198	198	192	189
50.0904	1	Music Theory & Composition	192	192	192	189
51.0204	2	Speech, Lang. Path. & Aud.	189	189	186	186
51.0701	1	Hlth Serv. Adm.	189	189	188	186
51.0907	1	Radiolog. Tech.	213	213	194-195	192
51.0908	1	Respiratory Ther.	194	194	202-203	199
51.1005	6	Med. Lab. Tech.	201.6	198.5	193-194	192
51.1601	4	Nursing	203	202	190-191	192
51.2306	1	Occup. Therapy	222	222	195	196
51.2308	1	Physical Therapy	221	221	207	201
52.0101	3	Business, Gen.	196	195.5	186	187
52.0201	8	Business Adm. & Mgt., Gen.	195	196	186	187
52.0205	1	Operations Mgt.	192	192	192	192
52.0301	7	Accounting	196.1	196	187	189
52.0601	3	Business Economics	195.3	196	187	189

CIP NUMBER	NO. OF PROGS. IN AL SURVEY-QTR. HR.	PROGRAM	MEAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	MEDIAN-AL PROGS. Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEAN Qtr. Hrs.	NAT. MEDIAN Qtr. Hrs.
52.0801	5	Finance, Gen.	194.8	195	189	189
52.1001	4	Human Resources Mgt.	194.1	192	190	192
52.1101	1	International Business	192	192	193-194	192
52.1201	2	Mgt. Information Systems	196.5	196.5	190-191	192
52.1401	3	Business Marketing	196.4	196	188	188

Table 3

COMPARISON OF MEAN AND MEDIAN OF ALABAMA PROGRAMS WITH NATIONAL DATA BY TWO-DIGIT CIP CATEGORY
Showing Percentage Above (+), Below (-), or the Same As (0) the National Mean and Median

Two-Digit CIP Category	CIP Category Title	Semester Hrs.—Mean	Semester Hrs.—Median	Quarter Hrs.—Mean	Quarter Hrs.—Median
01.	Agric. Business & Production	+4.5%	+7%	+1%	0
02.	Agricultural Sciences	+6%	+5%	+ <1%	0
03.	Conserv. & Renewable Natural Resources	—	—	+7.8%	+7.5%
04.	Architecture & Related Programs	+3.4%	+6.5%	+ <1%	- <1%
05.	Area,. Ethnic, & Cultural Studies	+4.6%	+6.4%	—	—
09.	Communications	+7.3%	+7.5%	+2.9%	+2.9%
11.	Computer & Information Sciences	+6%	+8.7%	+3.7%	+4%
13.	Education	+7.5%	+8%	+9.5%	+10.2%
14.	Engineering	+5.5%	+5.7%	+ <1%	+ <1%
15.	Engineering-Related Technologies	+1.3%	+1.5%	—	—
16.	Foreign Lang. & Lit.	+4.3%	+5.8%	+3.5%	+4%
19.	Home Economics	+3.7%	+3.8%	+2.7%	+2.7%
23.	English Lang. & Lit.	+5.3%	+5%	+ <1%	+1%
24.	Liberal Arts & Sci., Gen. Studies & Humanities	+3.8%	+6.7%	+6.5%	+8.8%
26.	Biological Sci./ Life Sci.	+5%	+6.5%	+4.6%	+6%
27.	Mathematics	+4.3%	+6.5%	+4.1%	+6.3%
30.	Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	—	—	+2.6%	+3.2%

Two-Digit CIP Category	CIP Category Title	Semester Hrs.—Mean	Semester Hrs.—Median	Quarter Hrs.—Mean	Quarter Hrs.—Median
31.	Parks, Rec., Leisure & Fitness Studies	+5.7%	+5.5%	- <1%	- <1%
38.	Philosophy & Religion	+3.7%	+4%	+4.3%	+4.3%
40.	Physical Sciences	+3.6%	+6%	+2.6%	+4.7%
42.	Psychology	+3.4%	+5.3%	+1%	+1%
43.	Protective Services	+4%	+5.3%	- <1%	+ <1%
44.	Public Adm. & Services	+3.7%	+4.4%	0	+ <1%
45.	Social Sciences & History	+4.3%	+5.6%	+1.7%	+2.4%
50.	Visual & Performing Arts	+5.3%	+6.6%	+1.6%	+3.4%
51.	Health Professions & Related Sciences	+7.6%	+7.7%	+4.9%	+5.4%
52.	Business Mgt. & Administrative Services	+2.6%	+2.8%	+3.1%	+2.6%

Table 4

COMPARISON OF MEAN AND MEDIAN OF ALABAMA PROGRAMS WITH 120 SEMESTER HOURS AND 180 QUARTER HOURS AT THE TWO-DIGIT CIP CODE LEVEL
Showing Percentage Above 120 Semester Hours and 180 Quarter Hours

Two-Digit CIP Category	CIP Category Title	Semester Hrs.—Mean (Perc. of hrs. > 120)	Semester Hrs.—Median (Perc. of hrs. > 120)	Quarter Hrs.—Mean (Perc. of hrs. > 180)	Quarter Hrs.—Median (Perc. of hrs. > 180)
01.	Agric. Business & Production	+10.4%	+10.4%	+6.6%	+6.6%
02.	Agricultural Sciences	+12.3%	+12.3%	+6.6%	+6.6%
03.	Conserv. & Renewable Natural Resources	—	—	+14.7%	+14.7%
04.	Architecture & Related Programs	+8.3%[1]	+8.3%[1]	+25.2%	+25.2%
05.	Area, Ethnic, & Cultural Studies	+6.6%	+6.6%	—	—
09.	Communications	+11.3%	+11.4%	+6.9%	+6.9%
11.	Computer & Information Sciences	+9.5%	+10.5%	+7.8%	+7.5%
13.	Education	+14.8%	+14.1%	+17.1%	+17.4%
14.	Engineering	+16.5%	+16.4%	+13.7%	+13.7%
15.	Engineering-Related Technologies	+9.8%	+9.8%	—	—
16.	Foreign Lang. & Lit.	+6.8%	+7%	+6.1%	+6.1%
19.	Home Economics	+8.4%	+8.5%	+7.4%	+7.4%
23.	English Lang. & Lit.	+8.4%	+7.6%	+3.7%	+3.7%
24.	Liberal Arts & Sci., Gen. Studies & Humanities	+6.6%	+6.6%	+8.8%	+8.8%

[1]The percentages for semester hours at 04. are for Regional and Urban Planning. The percentages for quarter hours are for architectural programs. Consequently, there is a large difference in the percentages for semester hours and those for quarter hours.

Two-Digit CIP Category	CIP Category Title	Semester Hrs.—Mean (Perc. of hrs. > 120)	Semester Hrs.—Median (Perc. of hrs. >120)	Quarter Hrs.—Mean (Perc. of hrs. > 180)	Quarter Hrs.—Median (Perc. of hrs. > 180)
26.	Biological Sci./ Life Sci.	+12%	+11.6%	+10%	+10.3%
27.	Mathematics	+7.5%	+8.3%	+7.5%	+7.7%
30.	Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	—	—	+6.6%	+6.6%
31.	Parks, Rec., Leisure & Fitness Studies	+11.2%	+11.2%	+2.6%	+2.6%
38.	Philosophy & Religion	+6.6%	+6.6%	+6.6%	+6.6%
40.	Physical Sciences	+7.6%	+9.6%	+6.9%	+7.8%
42.	Psychology	+6.5%	+7.0%	+4.4%	+2.7%
43.	Protective Services	+7.0%	+7.5%	+3.2%	+4.1%
44.	Public Adm. & Services	+7.4%	+7.9%	+3.3.%	+4.3%
45.	Social Sciences & History	+7.1%	+7.3%	+3.9%	+3.8%
50.	Visual & Performing Arts	+10.6%	+10.6%	+7.5%	+7.6%
51.	Health Professions & Related Sciences	+17.6%	+17.1%	+13.3%	+13.0%
52.	Business Mgt. & Administrative Services	+7.2%	+7.9%	+8.2%	+8.1%

Section 3

Recommendations

Following are recommendations to reduce time to degree, organized under three categories: Recommendations for the Commission; Recommendations for the Institutions; and Recommendations for the Legislature. Some of the recommendations are the suggestion of the Commission staff, while others are taken from reports of other states. If from another state, the name of the state is given in parentheses following the recommendation. Several of the recommendations might lend themselves well to performance-based budgeting, a strategy currently being explored by the Commission.

With the acceptance of these recommendations on August 8, 1997, the Commission on Higher Education directed the staff to work with the appropriate advisory groups to explore the strategies recommended. Before implementation or endorsement of a strategy, the staff will provide a report to the Commission regarding the feasibility of the recommendation and any objections raised.

Recommendations for the Commission

1. The Commission should consider requiring that new program proposals submitted by all public institutions, both two-year and four-year, show a comparison of credit hours to be required in the proposed program with similar programs in other states. This same requirement should be extended to proposals for extensions and alterations of existing programs.

2. The Commission should consider requiring that the institutions submit a written justification and a description of the entire curriculum for new program proposals exceeding 128 semester hours or 192 quarter hours. The same credit-hour limitation should hold true for existing programs undergoing extensions and alterations.

3. The Commission should consider adopting a policy that a program exceeding 128 semester hours or 192 quarter hours would not be eligible for a nonviability waiver in the implementation of Act 96-557.

4. The Commission should consider asking the institutions to devise an annual report detailing the review of credit hour requirements of existing academic programs and the reduction of requirements where advisable.

5. The Commission should consider eliminating formula funding for all undergraduate students who have attempted 150 or more semester hours (or the equivalent quarter hours) towards a degree without graduating. (Adapted from a recommendation by the Texas Comptroller.)

6. The Commission should consider developing strategies to increase the amount of financial aid available to traditional full-time students (that is, those students between the ages of 16 and 24 who have degree completion as their primary pursuit).

7. Using performance-based budgeting, the Commission should consider rewarding departments at public institutions for timely completions in academic programs.

8. The Commission should consider sponsoring a conference or other activity for Alabama institutions to explore strategies for reducing time to degree for working adults who are pursuing a degree on a part-time basis.

Recommendations for the Institutions

9. The institutions should consider guaranteeing time to degree. This guarantee would provide that a student who satisfied admission requirements, attended college full-time, followed the requirements for the program of study, and passed every course would be able to register for the courses needed to graduate in the period of time stated for that program. (Texas)

10. The institutions should consider basing the definition of "full time" on the number of credit hours needed each semester or quarter to graduate in four years, without attendance at summer sessions, and offer block tuition to meet those needs. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation.)

11. The institutions should consider reviewing and revising "drop" and "forgiveness" policies so that such policies encourage timely completion. Exceptions could be made for situations involving extreme emergencies or conditions. (Florida)

12. The institutions should consider limiting enrollment in courses outside degree program requirements, allowing students to enroll in no more than three courses beyond 128 semester hours or 192 quarter hours. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation)

13. The institutions should consider encouraging high school students to earn college-level credit by counseling potential students to participate in the College Board Advanced Placement (AP) Program, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, or the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). The institutions could grant appropriate academic credit to students who demonstrate competency by these means. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation).

14. The institutions should consider providing financial rewards to students who complete degrees in three academic years. For example, the institutions could provide tuition rebates in the amount of $1000 to students who complete requirements for baccalaureate degrees within three academic years from their initial registration in a higher education institution. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation.)

15. The institutions should consider using or enhancing the use of technology to increase information to and about students. Three possible initiatives for the use of technology are automated degree audit systems; on-line access to information on degree programs and requirements, course schedules, and catalogs; and electronic transmission of student data such as transcripts and portfolios. (Washington)

Recommendations for the Legislature

16. The Legislature should consider legislation imposing a surcharge for excessive credits. This tuition surcharge to undergraduate students would equal the full cost of education for more than 150 semester credit hours (or the equivalent in quarter credit hours) attempted in public institutions of higher education. (Texas)

17. The Legislature should consider legislation to encourage the use of distance education in providing heavily subscribed, lower and upper division core courses. This legislation would authorize the Commission on Higher Education to approve the offering of undergraduate core courses statewide via distance education by designated institutions. The legislation also would provide that all public institutions must accept transfer of these courses for full credit. The purpose of these courses primarily would be to meet the needs of working adults who are part-time students. (Adapted from a Texas recommendation.)

Key to Sources of Recommendations:

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(Texas)—Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Division of Research, Planning and Finance. Ten Strategies and Their Financial Implications for Reducing Time-to-Degree in Texas Universities. Austin, TX: October, 1996.

(Texas Comptroller)—Sharp, John [Comptroller]. Disturbing the Peace: The Challenge of Change in Texas Government, Vol. 2. Austin, TX: Comptroller of Public Accounts, 1996.

(Washington)—Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB). Institutional Productivity Initiatives: Time-to-Degree Study. Olympia, WA: HECB, 1994. Washington.

Endnotes

1. Illinois Board of Higher Education (BHE), "Factors Affecting Undergraduate Student Persistence and Time to Degree in Illinois Public Institutions" (Springfield, IL: BHE, 1995), 5; Alene Russell, State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) Electronic Mail Transmission to Academic Affairs Officers dated 5 September 1996, Subject: Time-to-Degree Summary; Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), 1996 Educational Benchmarks (Atlanta, GA: SREB, 1996) 41; John Sharp, Disturbing the Peace: The Challenge of Change in Texas Government, Vol. 2, Austin, TX: Comptroller of Public Accounts, 1996, 49.

2. The Education Resources Institute (TERI), Life After Forty: A New Portrait of Today's and Tomorrow's Postsecondary Students (Boston, MA: TERI, 1996), 13-15.

3. Alexander Astin, Lisa Tsui, and Juan Avalos, Degree Attainment Rates at American Colleges and Universities: Effects of Race, Gender, and Institutional Type (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 1996), 3-4; Siobhan Gorman, "Lawmakers Try to Discourage Students from Lingering in State Colleges," The Chronicle of Higher Education (16 August 1996): A27.

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5. Colorado Commission on Higher Education, "Enhancement of Efficiencies Toward the Completion of Degree Programs by State-Supported Institutions of Higher Education" (Denver, CO: Commission on Higher Education, 1993), 8; Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, "Using the State Grant Program to Promote Timely Completion, " "Attachment 3" and "Attachment 5" (St. Paul, MN : Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1990), 6; William Farrell, "Reduced Time-to-Degree: An Emerging Issue." Chancellor's Newsletter, University System of New Hampshire 6 (Winter 1996): 2-3.

6. Washington State Higher Education Coordination Board (HECB), Institutional Productivity Initiatives: Time-to-Degree Study (Olympia, WA: HECB, 1994), 6-7.

7. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), "Working While in College," Indicator of the Month (April 1996): 1-2.

8. Washington HECB, Institutional Productivity Initiatives: Time-to-Degree Study (Olympia, WA: HECB, 1994), 4-10.

9. Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission (PEPC), Course Withdrawal and Forgiveness Policies (Tallahassee, FL: PEPC, 1996), 3-5.

10. Cheryl D. Blanco, "Doing More With Less: Approaches to Shortening Time to Degree," Paper presented at the 1994 SHEEO Professional Development Seminar for State Higher Education Academic Officers and Government Relations/Communication Officers, 31 August-2 September 1994 (Coeur d'Alene, ID: SHEEO, 1994), 19;

SREB, 1996 Educational Benchmarks, 41; Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), Enhancing Our Strengths Through a Shared Vision: Planning for Higher Education 1996-2000 (Montgomery: ACHE, [1996]), 20-21.

11. Colorado CHE, "Enhancement of Efficiencies," 8.

12. Melodie Christal, "State Tuition and Fees Policies: 1996-97," SHEEO/NCES Communication Network News, XVI, No. 1(March 1997): 1-2; Alabama Commission on Higher Education, "Undergraduate Tuition and Required Fees Combined, Public Four-Year Institutions, 1980-81 - 1996-97," Unpublished raw data; Washington State HECB, Institutional Productivity Objectives, 8-9.

13. Clifford Adelman, The New College Course Map and Transcript Files: Changes in Course-Taking and Achievement, 1972-1993. Washington, DC: National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 1995, ix; Blanco, "Doing More With Less," 7.

14. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Classification of Instructional Programs, 1990 Edition (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1991); Florida Board of Regents, Survey on Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate Degrees: A Comparison of National and Florida Public Institutions (Tallahassee, FL: Board of Regents, 1995), ii.

15. Blanco, "Doing More With Less," 7.

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Appendix

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